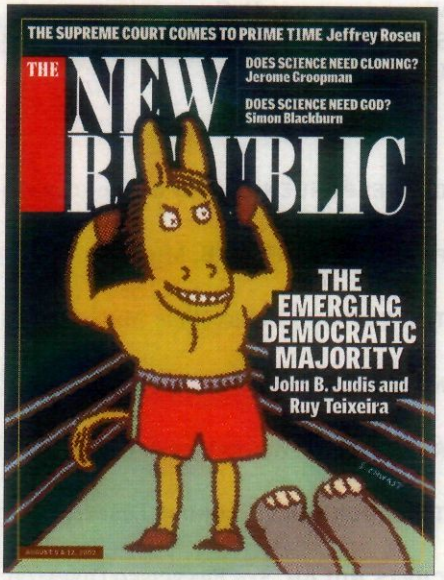
School supplies

TO THE EDITORS:

On paper at least, Peter Beinart makes a strong argument for an empirical study to determine once and for all if vouchers improve student achievement ("Test Case," July 29). What he doesn't understand, however, is that in the real world the "grand experiment" he proposes won't settle the matter. Even the best social scientists don't always agree on the score-based inferences they make about a student's status. Evidence is always subject to interpretation, even when it is gathered under controlled conditions. The clash of opinions between the Hoover Institution and FairTest, for example, over the use of standardized test scores to measure instructional effectiveness in public schools, illustrates how difficult it is to arrive at an agreement when stakes are high. Both groups are composed of eminent scholars, and yet they don't see eye to eye on issues of critical importance to the nation's schools. Why will things be any different when a blue-ribbon panel is convened, as Beinart suggests?

WALT GARDNER
Los Angeles, California


THE SUPREME COURT COMES TO PRIME TIME Jeffrey Rosen
THE
NEW
REPUBLIC
DOES SCIENCE NEED CLONING? Jerome Groopman
DOES SCIENCE NEED GOD? Simon Blackburn
THE EMERGING DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY
John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira

TO THE EDITORS:

Anti-voucher forces in Wisconsin have blocked the kind of "grand experiment" to evaluate school choice that Beinart proposes. Two years ago a coalition of Milwaukee employers, elected officials, educators, and community activists proposed a longitudinal study of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the nation's oldest voucher plan for low-income families. The group proposed that voucher supporters and opponents jointly finance the study. Further, it recommended independent oversight from Wisconsin's nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau. As documented by *Milwaukee Magazine* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, the Wisconsin Assembly approved the idea, but teachers' unions convinced anti-voucher allies in the Wisconsin Legislature to kill the plan.

Beinart might be right to suggest that some choice skeptics are open-minded enough to consider real evidence. That's immaterial as long as teachers' unions are driving the debate. Their interest is in distorting the facts, not in clarifying them.

GEORGE A. MITCHELL
Administrator
Fund for Choices in Education
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

TO THE EDITORS:

Beinart's TRB on school vouchers overlooks several important considerations. The overwhelming majority of nonpublic schools are pervasively sectarian institutions that practice forms of selectivity in hiring, admissions, and curricula that would be intolerable in public schools. Vouchers would inevitably fragment school populations along religious, ethnic, class, ideological, and other lines. We do not need another Northern Ireland.

While the Supreme Court held in June that vouchers do not violate the First Amendment, they still violate at least 37 state constitutions. Voters from coast to coast from all sectors of the population have rejected vouchers or their analogues by an aggregate average of two to one in 25 state referenda.

Regardless of what the Supreme Court's bare majority (the same justices who elected George W. Bush) has held, vouchers still violate the right of citizens not to be compelled by government to support religious institutions.

EDD DOERR
President
Americans for Religious Liberty
Washington, D.C.

Words of war

TO THE EDITORS:

In his review of *Six Days of War*, Tony Judt offers many words of praise—"gripping," "great learning," "vivid writing"—and others of reservation, but his purpose seems less to assess the important issues raised by my book than to mount an extended critique of Israel and its policies

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religious, and it is a thoroughly collaborative work, as emphatically Codazzi's as hers. But *San Gennaro in the Arena* brings out several important aspects of Artemisia Gentileschi's artistic personality: its collaborative base, her absorption of Neapolitan aesthetics, the versatility required of all Baroque designers.

FROM THE BEGINNING of her career to its end, Artemisia, like her father before her, worked in close collaboration with other artists. Modern art history, its tradition based on monographic studies of individuals, still lacks the critical tools to make much useful sense of these arrangements, unless—as with Raphael, Bernini, or Rubens—a major artist exerts dominating influence. And however dramatic her interactions with Tassi and her father became at one point in her life, Artemisia clearly got along with expertise in a predominantly male profession, hiring apprentices of her own and establishing arrangements with painters such as Codazzi who could complement her own talents.

In this respect, as in many others, the most important influence in Artemisia Gentileschi's life must have been her father, who would have taught her not only how to paint, but how to paint in teams; although she certainly called attention to herself as a woman painter, her environment was male, in her own studio as in her larger world (although she did interact with another woman painter, Giovanna Garzoni, a specialist in still life). At the very end of his career, Orazio Gentileschi finally called on her to work with him in partnership. In 1638, Queen Henrietta Maria of England engaged the seventy-four-year-old Orazio to decorate the great hall of her pleasure palace, the Queen's House at Greenwich. The commission called for an *Allegory of Peace and the Arts under the English Crown*, including images of the nine Muses, a subject that Orazio had tackled in Rome together with Agostino Tassi at the very moment when the latter undertook his pursuit of Artemisia. For one reason or another—fatigue, curiosity, a sense of impending mortality, a recognition of his own limitations, a last-ditch hope of reconciliation, or perhaps at the command of Henrietta Maria herself—Orazio Gentileschi sent for his illustrious daughter from the chill land of the Anglican infidels, and she came.

This trip and its possible motivations guide the shape of two recent historical novels about Artemisia Gentileschi, by Alexandra Lapierre and Susan Vreeland, and give them both their poignant significance. They go about telling the story in completely different ways. Lapierre has done exhaustive and even pioneering archival research (she discovered Tassi's sentence for the rape trial). Her *Artemisia* is as long and dense as Vreeland's *The Passion of Artemisia* is spare and concise. Vreeland, who has written another novel about art, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, searches for moods, trying to see Rome especially with a painter's sensitivity to light and color. The facts in her story are less reliable than Lapierre's, but neither are they of the same importance to her tale, just as Janet Lewis's atmospheric novel *The Return of Martin Guerre* does not suffer by comparison with Natalie Zemon Davis's factual account of the story: both are memorable books on their own terms. Both Lapierre and Vreeland have turned to the novel as a means of writing about Artemisia Gentileschi because fiction is the only medium, if not a Verdi opera, that will allow them to sound the emotional depths of the bond between father and daughter, and conclude on a note of reconciliation after a terrible betrayal.

This fraught relationship may indeed have been the central drama in the lives of both painters, for on her return from England Artemisia Gentileschi seems to have run out of energy, both physical and creative. Later letters complain about her health, while commissions continued to pour in for the subjects in which she had excelled for decades: Susanna, Judith, and veritable legions of Bathshebas. A *Bathsheba* on temporary display at the Capodimonte Museum in Naples is typical: a bland, pasty nude among bland handmaidens, wholly unexciting except for its stunning rendering of King David's palace in Jerusalem as a Baroque wonder—but the palazzo, as so often, was painted by Codazzi.

Declining energy, of course, is hardly rare among achievers, whether they be professors, novelists, or society painters. The fact that Artemisia followed this trajectory only proves how genuinely she succeeded, by every convention of her era and ours. As a painter, she will always have to concede in the end to the ugly swashbuckler Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, whose heroic fury was as great as hers and whose innovations were far greater. But in an age that had seen the steady erosion over centuries of women's legal rights, she managed to live out the Italian feminist motto of the 1970s: *Io sono mia*, I belong to me. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

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as an ongoing vehicle for war. Judt says that Syria warned Egypt of Israel's alleged war plans in 1967, while in fact it was the Soviets who informed Cairo. He states that Gamal Abdel Nasser demanded that U.N. peacekeepers withdraw from Gaza and remain on the Sinai border, when Nasser actually wanted the United Nations in Gaza and away from the border. He cites the number of Arab refugees from "the West Bank and Gaza" in 1967 as "between two hundred and three hundred thousand," when the Israeli figure was 175,000, and even the highest Arab claims never exceeded 250,000—and all from the West Bank; the numbers fleeing Gaza were negligible. He quotes Abba Eban's warning against the creation of an "ideology and rhetoric of self-worship and exclusiveness," juxtaposing it with supposed right-wing warnings of Israel's return to "Auschwitz frontiers," without mentioning who, exactly, coined the "Auschwitz frontier" phrase: Abba Eban.

Absent in this farrago of errors is any mention of Israel's prodigious achievements since 1967—the absorption of over one million refugees (mostly from the former Soviet Union), the empowerment of Jews from Islamic countries, and the maintenance of a robust democracy in the middle of a profoundly anti-democratic environment. Judt seems unwilling to acknowledge that Israel's triumph in 1967 enabled it to secure peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan—potentially with Syria and the Palestinians as well—and a strategic alliance with the United States.

Any fair and reasonable reader of my book would agree that Israel's victory in the Six Day War was the result of technical superiority and individual courage—a conclusion that Judt dismisses as "mythic." Perhaps he longs to return to the quaintly agrarian and elitist world of the '60s kibbutz. Maybe he would have preferred that Israel's victory in the Six Day War had been less than total. Clearly, though, in his "review" of my book, Judt demonstrates that when it comes to Israel today—multicultural, high-tech, and dynamic—he is anything but fair and reasonable.

MICHAEL OREN
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Jerusalem, Israel ■